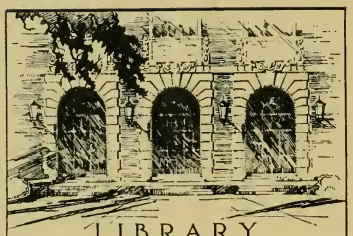

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THE CHURCH AND DEMOCRACY.

A PAPER READ AT THE MEETING OF THE CHURCH CONGRESS AT DERBY, OCTOBER 4TH, 1882.

BY

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THE CHURCH AND DEMOCRACY.

1. A FEW days ago I was looking through a somewhat crowded list ot engagements, and congratulating myself that with the end of September came the end of their pressure, and that before the opening of the University term I should at least have a few days of what I flattered myself would be a well-earned rest. I was especially happy in the fact that I had been released from a promise to speak on one of yesterday's subjects at this Congress, and was correspondingly grateful to your Committee. My gratitude was of short duration, for the next post brought me an urgent request to supply one of two places unexpectedly made vacant at the eleventh hour, and to address the Congress on "Church and Democracy." That request I tried to decline, but I could not find it in my heart to do so—partly because my experience on the committee of last year's Congress gave me something of a fellow-feeling for my brethren on this; chiefly because I thought that there was no subject on your list of greater practical importance, and that it must not, at any cost, be left unmanned. I should not have dared to choose it; I could not at any time add much to the solution of the problem, still less can I hope to do so now; but I can at least, as a working clergyman, whose lot is cast among the masses of the people, bear witness to the fact that it must not be left unsolved, and express the hope that the wisdom of this Congress may help to solve it aright.

2. Now when we speak of "democracy," we are, of course, admitting its existence, and have a more or less clear idea of its significance. Clerel de Tocqueville claimed to be an impartial judge of it, because it had not come into being when he was himself born; but he lived to be its historian. With prophetic insight and prophetic dread he foresaw the rapid strides which it would make, and lived to see his predictions fulfilled. The popular nature of English institutions and the stability of English character, have hitherto prevented our feeling the full force of the wave; but men who are not alarmists think that our present position is full of gravity. They read of Russia, of Germany, of France, of Ireland; Nihilism, Socialism, Communism, Fenianism, are ugly words and denote ugly things. Electricity and steam have brought both word and thing to our very doors. Will those doors still protect us? The British nation, more than any nation in the world, presents the striking contrast of property in the hands of the few, and political power in the hands of the many. You may be accustomed to weigh votes; the nation is pledged to count them. It requires but one more "leap in the dark" and our destinies will be absolutely in the hands of the people. The text on which to address them is not wanting, nor are the preachers. Hear for a moment words which are said to have been spoken to an audience of working men by the most eloquent orator in England:—"Just now (*The Right Hon. John Bright* is reported to have said) as I was on my way to this place to speak to you, I watched in the street a

magnificent carriage pass me ; and in that carriage were two splendidly dressed ladies. Who made that carriage? You did. Who made those dresses? You did. Have your wives any such carriages to drive in? Do your wives ever wear clothes of that kind? I watched that carriage farther, and I saw where it stopped. It stopped before a stately house with an imposing portico. Who built that house? You did. Do you and your wives live in any such houses as that?" *

These remarks were, of course, received with loud cheers. You will mark their import; I make no comment upon them ; my work is rather to point out the position of our Church in the conflict, and the duty of her sons in the struggle, which is said to be at hand.

3. That position I take to be absolutely unique. It is the high privilege and the grave responsibility of the Church of England to be able to speak with authority to the disputants on either side. She alone can claim rich and poor alike to be her children ; and, standing betwixt the approaching armies, forbid the war and declare a lasting peace :— "Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one another?"

(1) The assertion that the Church of England is the Church of the rich man is not likely to be questioned. In theory every Englishman is born within her fold ; and every broad acre of every estate, every site of every factory, every street of every town, every mile of every railway, is claimed by some one of her parishes. As a matter of fact the land-owners, the manufacturers, the capitalists, the men and women who represent the property of the country are for the most part, at least in profession, members of the Church of England. Here is her right to speak to them fully and frankly granted. They admit her authority ; they are bound to hear her voice. Let her then speak boldly and decidedly. Ler her clergy speak ; let her daughters speak ; let her lay sons speak ; let her, if she claims to be a pure and Apostolic branch of the Catholic Church of Christ, speak in the nineteenth century as she knows Christ and His Apostles did speak in the first century. Let her say, and by leavening public opinion let her make the truth felt as well as said, that a Christian's tenure of property is that of a trust committed to him by God for the good of man; that the doctrine of the dependence of rights upon duties is true of the rich man's acres as it is true of the poor man's claims. If the holders of property assert that it is sacred, let her teach them to regard it as sacred. Is the warning unnecessary? An hereditary peer gambling away the estates of his fathers ; a manufacturer sweating by farthings from the weary toil of women and children the thousands which he squanders on wasteful, and therefore, sinful luxury ; a capitalist gloating over his profitable returns, though they may have come direct from the gin palace and the haunts of vice, and every gold piece be stained by the blood of souls ; a Christian woman, who believes in the inspiration of St. Peter, wasting more on useless ornament than would rebuild or drain a squalid court and give to a hundred of her sisters the possibility of a Christian life — are such lessons rare, some of them very rare? Let the charity which hopeth all things hope that they are ; but let those who teach them remember that the masses are apt learners ; that one deed says more

* "Social Equality," by W. H. Mallock, London, 1882, p. 43.

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than a thousand words; that every owner of property who violates its sacred character and ignores its solemn responsibilities is placing the axe in hands that will surely seize it. And let the women and the men of our Church of England, in the name of our Master, Christ, protest against such deeds. Let mothers and fathers declare that women and men who do them shall not darken their doors, or with stained hands touch their daughters or their sons; let Christians in the every-day life of home, of the mart, of the club, cease to smile at such things—the demagogue alone can afford to smile at them—and let them rather weep. Let men be honoured for what they are, and not for what they have; let wealth be regarded as an accident of human life and not its essence; let disciples of Christ at least believe, and let them speak and act as though they believed, that a man's life is not a matter of magnificent carriages, and splendid dresses, and porticoed houses, that it "consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth."

(2.) The assertion that the Church of England is the Church of the poor man, is also one that is not likely to be seriously questioned; and public opinion in our own day will deal sharply and decisively—the more sharply and the more decisively the better—with every obstacle that prevents its being so. She is the Church of the poor man, because she is the Church of England. He can claim his share in her endowments; he can claim the services of her ministers; he can claim his place—a Church which believes in the inspiration of St. James will not give him the worst place—in her buildings. She has then the right to speak authoritatively to him, and she has grounds of appeal which must necessarily command his confidence :—

Does he feel the burden of a life of constant work and pressing penury? The Church of Christ is founded on the perfect life of One who was the Son of a carpenter and a carpenter Himself, who lived the poor man's life, and ate the peasant's black barley-bread, and had not even a hovel which He could call His own. Every man who believes that the life of Christ is the noblest ever lived on earth has a faith that ennobles labour and sanctifies even want.

Do European workmen claim a higher place in the world's esteem and a greater share in the product of their work? It is the Church of Christ which has given them all the honour and all the rights they have. Even a Plato declared that an artisan's life served no other end than the practice of his trade, and a Cicero held that a workshop was incompatible with anything noble. Christianity first called the workman "brother," and lifted him to the true dignity of man. The Church dared baptize emperor and slave in the same font, and bade them kneel before the same altar, and taught them that there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Have the working classes claimed a fuller freedom, a wider liberty, rights of union and organisation for common good? The very idea of the Church of Christ is of an all-inclusive brotherhood. Her name ἐκκλησία means not a body called out of the wider humanity, but the body of mankind as such called out of the selfism of the individual into the corporate life of the whole. The lesser brotherhoods and societies which are co-extensive with Christianity, are all of them her offspring and are practically unknown beyond her pale.

Do men claim liberty? The Church found one half of mankind in bondage to the other, sold as chattels or butchered to glut a monster's savagery; and wherever she has uttered her voice she has bidden the slave go free.

Are rights claimed for women and for children? The Church found women the mere creatures of man's passion, and infanticide a recognised practice. It is the voice of Christ and His Church that has declared human life sacred, and has blessed the poor man's cottage with the hallowed love of wife and child.

I am warned that I may not dwell longer on the Church as the friend of humanity in the past. But the fact that she has ever been so, gives her the right to address humanity in the present. Are men still poor and oppressed? then, if the Spirit of the Lord be upon her, she has a Gospel for the poor, and release for the captives, and sight for the blind, and liberty for the bruised; and if she declares this as Christ declared it, the common people will hear her gladly. If she declares it as Christ declared it, she will not flatter them, and they will despise her if she does. She will not set class against class; she will not speak of their rights; but will here, too, lay stress on duties, and by first teaching their duties will effectually create their liberties. If she is tempted to forget this necessary order, the poet of freedom will himself remind her of it:—

> "Licence they mean when they cry, Liberty,
> For who loves that must *first* be wise and good."

(3.) In making these remarks on the Church's mission to the working classes, I have had in my mind the obvious and frequent objection that, whatever our theory may be, the practical outcome is that thinking working men are brought to a very slight extent into any relation whatever with either the Church or the clergyman. This objection is in part false, and it ought to be wholly false.

(A.) It is in part false, let these facts among others testify and teach—(*a*) When the Co-operative Congress met at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, they chose as their president the Bishop of the diocese. (*b*) The Bishop of Manchester, on three important occasions, has acted as arbitrator between masters and men. Chosen by both, his decision commanded the confidence, and gained the thanks of both. Christians will not forget, families saved from the fearful struggles of a strike did not forget, that "Blessed are the peacemakers." (*c*) The trades' unionists are to be addressed at Middlesborough, on the first Sunday in the next month, by the Archbishop of the province. (*d*) A committee of clergy on "Trades Unions and the Church," has existed for the last two years. To say that it includes the Bishops of Durham and Bedford, and the Deans of St. Paul's and Carlisle; and that amongst those who have conferred with it are Mr. Holyoake and Mr. George Howell, is to say that it exists in more than name.

(B.) The objection ought to be, and it is in our hands to make it, wholly false. No race of men in the world are more honest than the working men of England. They have a prejudice against black coats, but this may not be altogether undeserved, and at all events it may very soon be removed. Perhaps we have some natural prejudice against black faces. A crowd of artisans pouring out of a workshop, or a crowd of pitmen coming from a night shift, do not always look like

men and brethren: but you need not be afraid of the coal dust. It will wash off; the diamond is in another form, both on the man and in him; and when you get face to face with these men, when you look at things from their standpoint, when you are willing to learn in order that you may teach, when you have seen that there is a real man beneath the black face, and they have seen that there is a real man beneath the black coat, and that neither is a scarecrow, you will find the great heart of humanity here, as everywhere, beating true. The working men of England will listen whenever they find that more than a voice is speaking to them. Did they not listen to Frederick Maurice and Charles Kingsley? Did they not in this diocese listen to their Bishop Selwyn? Did they not in the East of London listen to the layman Edward Denison, to the priest Charles Lowder? They are men, do not reason about them as though they were machines; they are men, do not be afraid of them, as though they were brutes; they are men, do not expect them to be faultless, as though they were angels; they are men, do not feed them with spoons, as though they were children; they are men, with sharp, God-given intellects and great God-endowed souls; and they will hear the Church of Christ, they will hear the Church of England, for she has God's truth to tell them and God's love to give them.

But if the assertions which I have ventured to make are based upon facts, the Church of England has in this her power to reach the rich, and in this her power to reach the poor, a responsibility which should rest heavily on every Churchman. If she is the Church of England she ought to be the salt of England, but "if the salt have lost its savour, wherewith shall it be salted?" Is the beloved mother of us all "to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men?" Let her children answer. Not unless they make her "good for nothing." Her rights also must depend upon duties. Let her in the day of trial be found faithful; let her, as I verily believe she alone can, save the nation, and she will save herself; yea she will remain established in the loving hearts of a thankful people, and a nation yet unborn—this nation born again—shall arise to call her blessed.

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